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Screen Choice: The Relations, Interactions and Articulations of Watching Film

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ABSTRACT

People watch films on televisions, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and cinema screens. As technologies, each of these screen types provide different opportunities to select particular films, and to choose when and where to watch them. This raises questions about how and why people choose particular screens and the viewing experiences they gain from doing so. To address these questions, we draw on 200 semi-structured interviews with film audience members in England. We use Livingstone's (1998, 2013) notion of interactions and relations and Hartmann's (2006) notion of a 'triple articulation' of media to approach screens as technologies that carry a particular range of films. Here, films are understood as texts, and each screen a medium that provides opportunities to watch films in specific temporal and spatial contexts. We find that people tend to: (1) watch films at the cinema, either to socialise or to feel part of an temporary auditorium-based community – whilst immersing within the text; (2) on television sets in the living-room to relax or socialise; (3) on laptops or tablets in the bedroom for personalised engagement; and (4) via smartphones for convenience and to pass time when away from home. Overall, we argue that people's film-watching is embedded within specific contexts and that people choose particular screen types for the opportunities they offer for watching particular films in particular times and places. In this, people choose screen types and configure various temporal and spatial aspects of their film-watching environments to seek out specific viewing experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

People watch films on a range of screens, including televisions, laptops, tablets, smartphones and cinema screens. Each offers different opportunities to access particular films and to choose when and where to watch them. This raises questions about how and why people choose particular screens, how they organise their film-watching around them, and what viewing experiences each offers. Research about the use of screens to watch films has, to date, tended to focus on how film audiences are brought together and/or how film content might be interpreted. Little attention has been paid to how and/or why people choose particular screens, how they make sense of the opportunities each screen offers, and how different screens feature within people's film-viewing practices and experiences. Our research shows that people choose particular screens based on the temporal and spatial flexibilities they offer for choosing which films to watch, and when and where they can do so. We add that people make decisions over which screen to use to elicit specific film-viewing experiences.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In the next section we describe the opportunities for watching films that different screens offer. This provides a background context for our argument. Next, we explain how our analysis of 200 semi-structured interviews underpins that argument. We then draw on that analysis to set out our findings on the temporal and spatial aspects involved with watching film on each screen, the opportunities people take up in doing so, as well as the viewing experiences they elicit. To bring our findings together we move on to a discussion section where we explain how and why people choose specific screens to watch films in particular times and spaces. Also, how those choices relate to the opportunities that each screen type offers. Overall, we argue that people take up the opportunities different screens offer actively and selectively for the specific film-watching experiences they provide. We close the paper by explaining how our argument advances screen studies through both its focus on different types of screen, and in moving beyond a focus on screens as either technologies that people engage with to watch film or as media that carry texts in a specific way, treating them instead as both.

UNDERSTANDING HOW SCREENS FEATURE IN WATCHING FILM

There has been a proliferation of screens since the 1950s and people now watch films on televisions, laptops, tablets, smartphones and at the cinema. Screens are embedded within wider media distribution and programming infrastructure and broadcast digital technology. Each screen offers a particular range of

opportunities for choosing what to watch, when and where, and features in how relate to and interact with film.

The proliferation of screens aligns with changes in how audiences engage with media, including screens and texts. Audiences are now seen as engaging with media in a variety of ways, and are active in interpreting texts, choosing which media to use, what to view, when, where, and whether to do so alone or with others. Livingstone (1998) therefore suggests that audiences should be conceptualised as relational or interactive to acknowledge the diverse sets of relationships between people and media forms. This includes types and levels of interactivity, such as the ability to stop, start, pause or record films. People also develop relationships with media technology and content, e.g. they may have a preferred venue, genre, or way of viewing. Understanding these relationships and interactions requires asking how media are located and understood in people's social and cultural practices (Livingstone, 2013). This entails looking at the importance people place on different times and spaces in making sense of different screens (Livingstone, 2007). In particular, we look at how people relate their film-viewing experiences to different screens. Also, how people interact with one another, with films, and with different film-watching environments.

To that end, this paper goes beyond traditional audience reception studies' focus on how viewers interact with screens and/or film content on an individuated basis. Instead, it extends work within new cinema histories that draws on empirical data to develop theory or on the experience of film-watching. Examples of which include the use of interviews to examine how people experience night-time film-watching at multiplex cinema venues (Hubbard, 2003), audience formation at independent ones (Evans, 2011), and (combined with survey data) to examine film-watching in different countries (Barker and Brooks, 1998; Barker and Mathijs, 2012). However, rather than being confined to case studies of a particular context, setting, or place, the paper draws on mixed methods research in a different way, using it instead to examine nuance in the way films and screens feature within people's lives, and how both are articulated. In doing so, this paper follows on from previous work that drew on mixed methods data to identify five distinct types of film audience experience (Hanchard, Merrington, and Wessels, 2020). In this paper, the onus is placed less on audience formation or type, and more on examining how people connect with media and media texts through various screens. We argue that screens feature in that connection, with people interacting with media and developing a relationship with specific types of media such as film.

The use of screens, as media technologies, have temporal and spatial dimensions (Silverstone, 1993). People have some flexibility in how they manage time

in their personal lives, but they also have to adhere to institutional time. The use of media technologies including screens intersect with these temporal aspects. Film programming in cinemas structures, for example, the institutionalised screening times at which people can watch films. Meanwhile, in domestic and private settings watching times for films on television are both institutionalised through broadcasting schedules. This opens film-viewing to being fit into personal times through the opportunities to record, stream and/or stop, start and pause films. These latter capabilities, which are also offered by mobile media, help people to manage time in relation to their personal lives (Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley, 1992). Time, its quality and organisation, is tied up with the material and symbolic organisation of space because as Silverstone points out ‘activities in time take place in available spaces’ (1993: 287). In terms of spaces for screens to watch film, the living-room, kitchen, or bedroom are domestic spaces, mobile screens are part of personal space and the cinema screen is part of an auditorium space. Time and space feature in relationships with screens because people make choices about what screens to use when and where, and what texts to view when and where. This draws attention to the ways in which people interact with different types of screens and their relationship with them in terms of time and space and how this shapes their viewing experiences.

To address the richness of screens within film-viewing experiences, and how people relate and interact with them requires seeing them as an object, a text and as a symbolic environment or context (Courtois, Verdegem and DeMarez, 2012). Hartmann (2006) calls this the ‘triple articulation’ of media, defining media technologies as simultaneously objects, texts, and environments. This approach is useful in understanding how screens feature in people’s film-viewing because it addresses the characteristics of the screen as an object, what text is under review, such as film, and how these are understood as part of a context and environment, symbolically and physically. These three aspects are seen in the types of screen and watching film, including cinema screens in the context of cinema, the small screen in the context of television and the home, and tablets and smartphones for mobile use.

As Hadida et al., (2020) note, people have watched full-length feature films of around ninety-minutes at cinemas since the 1930s, and it remains a popular cultural activity to date (UK Cinemas Association, 2020). Cinema has evolved over this period to include multiplex, boutique, and independent venues. Multiplexes offer multiple (often ten or more) screens, showing new releases in purpose-built consumer-focussed spaces (Eyles, 2014; Hubbard, 2003). Independent single and two-screen venues target niche audiences with non-mainstream titles (Stoke and Jones, 2017). Two and three-screen boutiques show both new and old films,

including mainstream and non-mainstream ones whilst providing luxury consumer experiences (Hansen, 2013). Each venue type provides access to a different range of films, and involves viewers having a relationship with slightly different types of cinema space as film-watching environments. However, the cinema screen is fixed in place within each of them. Programming at each cinema venue provides viewers with a choice over the particular film to watch on cinema screens (from a limited range) at a scheduled time in a set place.

As television entered British homes from the 1950s onwards it enabled people to watch films privately (rather than publicly at the cinema) – either alone or with friends/family in ‘living-room audiences’ (Livingstone and Das, 2013). People relate to the television as a technology embedded in domestic space which carries film on a ‘small screen’ (Bennett, 2010). Initially, television only provided access to films at scheduled times. However, the introduction of cable and satellite channels, Betamax, VHS/VCR, DVD/Blu-Ray and web-based video-on-demand streaming services (VoDs) from the late 1970s onwards have all extended the range of films people can choose to watch on television and choice over when to watch them. The same advances have also enabled people to borrow, hire, and share films, generating new forms of social interaction and relations. Together, the opportunities provided by television expanded the temporal flexibility people have over choosing when to watch films.

This temporal flexibility was extended further in the 1990s and 2000s with personal computers and laptops becoming a common feature of British homes (Allington et al., 2019). With laptops, incrementally better speaker and sound card technologies meant they could be used as portable technologies for various purposes (Haddon, 2011). This includes film-watching – albeit via a smaller-sized screen than the ‘big screen’ cinema or ‘small screen’ television (Wasson, 2007). Laptops carry a broad range of films in CD-ROM, DVD, Blu-Ray, digital file formats, and VoD, and thus provide access to various films. Meanwhile, their web-connectivity provides opportunities for borrowing and/or sharing films (both legally and illegally) amongst large geographically distributed networks through peer-to-peer file-sharing, torrenting and streaming services (Guidi, 2013; Herbert, Lotz and Marshall, 2018). This provides viewers with opportunities to choose which film to watch from a broad selection, and temporal flexibility over when to watch it. Meanwhile, their portability provides spatial flexibility for watching films either within the home or outside it (Bakardjieva, 2005; Vuojärvi, Isomäki, and Hynes, 2010).

These temporal and spatial flexibilities have been extended further through the introduction of mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones from the mid-2000s onwards, enabling people to watch films anywhere at any time (Agar, 2013; BARB, 2020; Berry and Schleser, 2013). Mobile devices facilitate fewer film

formats than television or laptops, e.g. they cannot play Betamax, VHS, DVD, Blu-ray, or CD-ROMs. However, their convenient screen size (smaller than a television or laptop), portability, and use of digital files and VoDs provide users with the opportunity to stream or download and watch particular films at any time or place they choose without the need for a web connection (Herbert, Lotz and Marshall, 2018; Netflix, 2020). Like laptops, film piracy is also prevalent on mobile devices with viewers frequently sharing and streaming film content peer-to-peer (Mckenzie, 2020; Keslassy, 2018). Mobile devices offer temporal and spatial flexibility for choosing what to watch, when, and where via a conveniently sized portable screen.

Overall, each screen type, the films it shows, and the context it is watched in offer a particular range of opportunities for choosing what to watch, when, and where. Each screen is differently sized, offering a particular level of portability, and each distributes and shows a specific range of film. Each offers a different level of spatial and temporal flexibility for watching film. This includes choices about whether to watch films in public (e.g. at a cinema venue) or in private (e.g. at home), and whether to watch alone or with others (e.g. friends and/or family). However, little is known about why people choose particular screens, how they make sense of the opportunities that each screen type offers or how different screens feature within their day-to-day film-viewing.

METHODOLOGY: EXAMINING THE USE OF SCREEN TO WATCH FILMS

To examine how different screens feature within people's everyday film-watching (both as technologies and as media) and how their use is embedded with a specific temporal and spatial context, we draw on 200 semi-structured qualitative interviews. These were conducted between November 2017 and April 2018 for '*Beyond the Multiplex: Audiences for specialised film English regions*' research (UKRI, 2017) which received ethical approval from Newcastle University research ethics committee in 2017 (ref: BH161701). The participants were recruited online, by phone, and face-to-face as a purposive sample of audience members covering the widest possible range of socio-demographic measures (e.g. age, disability, education, ethnicity, gender, household income). Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling for deeper examination of themes as they emerged. All participants provided consent on the basis that their input would be confidential and anonymous and have each been assigned a pseudonym.¹

The semi-structured interviews provide rich and detailed insights into people's film-viewing histories, preferences and practices. Although these were gathered

through fairly informal two-way conversations (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Kvale, 1996) we used topic guides to loosely structure each interview, ensuring that questions and their sequence remained consistent, as advocated by Silverman (2010). However, we allowed participants to disrupt that sequence in moving from one point of discussion to the next – both to maintain a natural flow of conversation and to delve into specific points in more detail (Brinkmann, 2018).

In the interviews we asked questions about participants' film-viewing histories, preferences and practices in terms of what they had watched, where, when, with whom, via which type of screen, and their rationale for having done so. To analyse the interviews we undertook an 'applied thematic analysis', inductively and exploratorily examining both the '...implicit and explicit ideas within the data...' (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 10) to identify recurrent themes. This involved using NVivo (version 12) to code the full transcripts of all 200 interviews through several passes, with text segmented into codes that were whittled down with each pass to identify themes. As part of that work we identified a set of themes around audience types, presented below as four discernible patterns in the way film audiences are experienced. For this, all quoted participants below are illustrative of a particular theme. To frame our theorisation of those themes we drew on the concepts discussed above, e.g. that screens are engaged in a relational and interactive way through a specific triple articulation.

THE TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL ASPECTS OF WATCHING FILM ON FOUR DIFFERENT SCREEN TYPES

In this section we discuss the temporal and spatial aspects of watching films on the four different screens identified as significant in our analysis. We pay attention to the relations and interactions at play in people's use of each screen. In doing so, we address each screen as a technology used in particular times and spaces and as a medium that carries a specific range of films. Throughout, we highlight the choices that people make in watching films on a particular screen and the experiences they elicit by doing so.

WATCHING FILMS AT THE CINEMA

As noted above, there are different types of cinema venue, each offering a different range of films and a particular film-watching environment. However, in each venue type cinema-going involves having opportunities to watch films all the way through, tied to a sensibility that '...when you're in the cinema you have to watch every moment [of a film] ...' (Rachel). Expanding on this Pete explains the cinema environment enables him

to immerse within films by watching them all the way through without distraction: ‘...[if] there’s a really good film that you want to watch...you want to give your entire attention...engaged from start to finish...’ Expanding on this, Jose adds that choosing to watch a film at ‘...a cinema, it’s more clear, you are watching a film because you want to, because it excites you...’. That is, cinema-going revolves around watching films all the way through and immersing in its content to seek out excitement, whereas ‘...watch[ing] it at home is maybe just to relax...’ (Jose).

A venue’s programme dictates when a film can be watched there. For example, Bernard watches newly released films at ‘...big [multiplex] cinemas in the town [because] the local cinemas will get [it] probably later – years, months later...’. People often choose the cinema ‘...[t]o keep up with what’s coming out...’ (Isaiah). However, as Henrich notes, people ‘...watch older films as well as new releases’ at the cinema. Venues’ programming is an important aspect of cinema-going in that it shapes the opportunities and choices of film that people can watch on cinema screens.

People watch films at cinemas for various reasons. Some go to watch new releases. Others, like Francois, go because the venue has a specific festival or season: ‘...at the moment they are showing all the Wes Anderson films – not Wes Anderson, Paul Thomas Anderson!... they also have, like, mental health week’.

Alongside choosing the cinema for specific films, festivals or seasons, people’s cinema-going frequency fluctuates throughout their life. For instance, when Owen’s relationship with his partner ended, he moved to a new town where he had no friends. The cinema offered him a way to meet people and socialise, regularly filling up his evening free-time. When Owen met a new partner, cinema-going featured less frequently in his life:

I went a bit more there than I had for a while and then I moved...and I had no real friends, and I met people through the film club, so more [to] socialise and because I was, still, I was living alone again, but I started going to cinema over the evening just to fill the evenings again, so, and now it’s got dropped again because I got a partner again...

What the accounts above show is that the cinema is held meaningful as a specific film-viewing environment. Madge, for example, relates low-lighting in cinema auditoriums with a sense of anonymity; watching in a ‘...darken[ed] room with strangers and, you know, shar[ing] the film...’ with them. Lizzie associates this sense of anonymity with being part of temporary community:

....everyone is alone in [the] cinema really, no one knows who anyone is, a small tiny temporary community is formed...You wouldn’t normally sit

at home in a dark room with people you don’t know...It feels like the rules are temporarily suspended....

However, venues differ in their ambience. As Lyon explains, his local independent venue ‘...used to be a cinema, so you can sit on the balcony which is a bit weird looking down at the film...’, suggesting that, like many other independent cinemas, it is purpose-built with a distinctive layout. This distinctiveness provides independent cinema venues with a unique atmosphere, as Olivia notes, when describing how watching at her usual independent cinema differs from the generic experience of a multiplex:

...I don’t like the Multiplexes...they offer a good screening experience...but it could be anywhere. It has got no atmosphere... [independent cinema] is still going and it’s quirky. It’s an unusual cinema. It’s part of a listed building...you get a sense of architecture and kind of a spirit of the place...It’s different from anywhere else, so it makes it an unusual and a unique experience...

Expanding on this further, Coleman notes that boutique cinemas are closer to the generic feel of multiplex venues in the quality of their audio-visual equipment, but offer better services and facilities:

‘...it has that multiplex feel to a certain extent... the same sort of large theatre format, with a large screen...’ but that ‘...they do provide different experience... [such as] a better range of food and drink.... [and] more recently...you can get table service...’.

On the latter point, Coleman adds that ‘...if you go to [a multiplex] I’m sure you can get a beer, but probably not be a kind of beer that I would want to drink...’, suggesting that boutique cinemas offer a different (preferable for Coleman) range of consumption choices. However, in choosing a specific cinema type, Christo highlights that film choice is often more important than the venue or its atmosphere. He adds that multiplexes ‘...are generally the same...[it] is fairly easy to book, they are cheaper to go, and are interesting, but it’s not the location – it’s the film that I am going to see, right?’. His decision is based on cost and ease of access. Meanwhile, Olivia and Lyon (above) privilege independent venue specificity, and its ambience as a distinctive space. Meanwhile, Coleman describes boutique cinema-going as revolving around customer experience.

WATCHING FILMS ON TELEVISION IN THE LIVING-ROOM

Television features regularly in home life. For example, when Ishmael notes that ‘...you want the TV on, don’t

you, half the time?', he portrays having it as being on at home as a background media. Viewers often '... stumble across the film...' (Ibid.) serendipitously rather than actively selecting particular films. Others record films (in various formats) and use VoD services, noting they provide choice over film selection and flexibility over when they can be watched on television. Luther, for example, explains that '...if it's on-demand in any way, shape, or form, you can do [it] on whatever day you want'. He highlights opportunities to choose when to watch a particular film as a key aspect of his regular use of television at home. However, Clarissa notes there are different levels of choice. She differentiates between waiting to download films when broadcast and VoD streaming:

...[With] Sky you can just download it...you have to wait till they actually put it on, and then you record it, but with the downloading [on-demand] – you just download straight away and then, you just watch it whenever you want.

Television also offers opportunities to stop/start films, and to choose whether to watch all the way through or to watch segments at different times. When Miles, for example, watches films on television '...at home, [he] can freeze and then go and have a cup of tea or check on [his] phone, or do something else, and come back...' to pick up the film again later. Together, Ishmael, Luther, Clarissa and Miles highlight nuanced levels of choice that television provides over film choice, and temporal flexibility in choosing when they can be watched.

In spatial terms, people often watch films alone in the living-room to limit distractions from others whilst seated in a comfortable environment. For example, Penelope sits on her living-room settee to watch films, describing the environment (and seating) as comfortable and free from distractions. She relates this with being able to relax, noting that 'I don't really like the experience that much of being with, like a lot of other people like sort of other people talking and I find it distracting, I'd rather be on the sofa, it's comfy, TV (laughs), I really, like, kind of chill out'.

Other people appropriate the space in different ways, depending on whom they watch with. When Scarlett, for instance, watches films on television '...with [her] friends in the living-room... [they] tend to just stay still and watch it...' without changing the environment. Emelia, by contrast, appropriates the space in different ways depending on who she is with. On Sundays, she sits down to watch films (either alone or with her partner) to relax, leaving the space as it is. When watching with friends, it is primarily about socialising and shared experiences of a film, so she emulates the cinema environment by closing the curtains to darken the film-watching space whilst eating fast-food:

...I will quietly sit by myself and chill out in front of a movie....Myself and my boyfriend...[are] both really busy... we tend to take a day out on Sundays to chill... I have 'friends film nights' ...me and my friends will get together... the stereotypical "let's pull up a bunch of [fast-food] and close the curtains and make a cinema night of this"....

Other people incorporate peripheral technologies into their television set to appropriate it. Gary, for example, feels cinema has a better sound system than television; an important feature for his enjoyment of films. To emulate the cinema's aural space at home he connects a speaker to his television set:

...the sound in a cinema...I listen to the music [and] think, "Wow, you know, that is fantastic, almost feel like I'm in a gig"...at home, on television...I've tried to compensate for that [with] ...a Bose speaker I connect to watch a film...[it] creates more drama...I'm just trying to enhance that... it comes across better if you've got a really good sound system...

What Emelia and Gary illustrate is that people take up opportunities to configure their film-watching environment (e.g. their living-room space) in different ways when watching on television at home.

Overall what the accounts above show is that, as a technology, television is fitted within the domestic space of the living-room and used regularly either as background media – watching whatever happens to be on – or by choosing to watch particular films on-demand at specific times. As such, it is interpreted and made meaningful in different ways, and associated either with relaxation (when alone or with others) or with socialisation through shared experiences of watching a film. People elicit specific viewing experiences by appropriating the film-viewing environment in different ways, depending on who the film is watched with – and thus choose how to interact with others through their film-watching. People also augment the television with peripheral technologies – to emulate the experience of other screen types (e.g. recreating the cinema space at home).

WATCHING FILMS ON A LAPTOP OR TABLET IN THE BEDROOM

Although laptops and tablets provide opportunities to choose when and where to watch a broad range of films, people tend to watch films on a laptop or tablet in their bedroom, choosing films that have not yet been broadcast on television, or that have aired and are no longer available. For instance, when Peggy and her partner want to watch a film that is not available via their television, or that they have missed, they choose to use a laptop:

Something that's not available on the TV, or sometimes stuff that's available on the TV is only available for a limited period, but you can watch it online through different medium – so that would be when we'd watch something on the laptop.

Others use laptops to 'catch-up' on films they have missed. Molly, for example, watches films and programmes she missed when initially broadcast on television to '... catch it up on the laptop, just 'cause I really want to see it....'. She also describes a process of weighing-up the opportunity to choose what to watch and when against the quality of the visual experience, finding that it has '...a rubbish picture 'cause we've got an old laptop'. Film-viewing on laptops also tends to be associated with watching films at home – despite the portability of the technology. As Isabell explains, this is because the laptop is often meaningful as a domestic medium that is regularly engaged for film-watching in home life, with other screens engaged with less often: 'I go to see them outside about 15–20 times a year, and... [at] a festival, obviously, I'd be going for a few days, watching every day...at home on my laptop...[I] upstream them...[on] Netflix or like – not TV!'

Although their convenient size and portability mean tablets are technologically similar to smartphones, in use they tend to be associated with regular film-watching at home in much the same way as laptops. People often describe tablet-based film-watching as something they do to relax, e.g. '...just [to] unwind from work really' (Jose) when at home. Laptop and tablet screens are both meaningful as domestic media embedded within a particular place within the home (the bedroom). For example, when Smith watches films with his partner '...it is in bed with a laptop on a box at the end of the bed....'. Although this echoes Peggy's account above, Smith clarifies that it is specifically associated with being in bed. Sophie seconds this, albeit watching alone, explaining that '...the predominant way that I would watch film would be, sort of by myself, on my laptop at home, in bed with some red wine...'. Relating laptops and tablets with the bedroom creates a demarcation of the home, with television fixed in the living-room and laptops and tablets fitted into bedroom space. Navigating between the two screen types, Scarlett clarifies that she watches films on television with '...friends in the living-room [and]... on my laptop in my bedroom [when alone]...' highlighting how the screen types are used in different ways in different places.

Although they are meaningful as domestic screen types, laptops and tablets both provide opportunities to access films in a broad range of ways. This often requires decisions to be made both about what to watch and *how*. Scarlett, for example, weigh-ups the visual quality of watching pirated films on her laptop at home against the cost of going to the cinema for a better viewing experience:

...streaming online illegally, I do a lot of that...one's just been released on DVD, not like the bad quality camera in the hand kind of thing...It's so expensive to go to the cinema...unaffordable for me, but the cinema experience is better...

Overall, laptops and tablets are made meaningful as domestic screens for watching a broad range of films at home (specifically in the bedroom) – despite the portability of both screen types. This includes films that are not available on television, or that were missed when broadcast. The visual quality they offer is often perceived as lower than other screens, with viewers weighing up their access to a wide range of content on laptops and tablets with viewing quality.

WATCHING FILMS ON A SMARTPHONE

Smartphones provide opportunities to choose where to watch films – alongside what and when to watch them. For example, Lucien '...can take [his] phone...anywhere, and watch that anywhere, anytime...', pointing to the temporal and spatial flexibility of the screen type. However, this relies on a specific use of the technology and infrastructure supporting it. When Patsy, for instance, compares television and smartphone film-viewing, she explains that '...with my phone I can download the film after you bought them. I can watch anywhere without having to use the Wi-Fi...' By using her smartphone in a particular way (downloading films prior to viewing rather than streaming on-demand) Patsy maintains flexibility in being able to watch at a time and place of her choice, rather than being limited to places with web connectivity.

Other people draw on the temporal and spatial flexibility smartphones offer to fill time. Mathew, for instance, downloads films to watch later to fill long train journey times:

If I'm prepared enough to download a film so that I can watch it on my phone, then I would watch a film on the train, [but] only if it's a long-distance journey, obviously! So, if you're traveling to London, like Liverpool to London, it's two hours approximately, so it's kind of [a] perfect time to watch [a] film.

Being able to choose when and where to watch often leads to fragmented viewing – with films watched in separate segments. Patsy, for instance, notes '...you can stop and start if you're getting on a bus...you stop it, watch it, and then stop it when you get back off the bus'. Likewise, when Marion '...used to use the bus a lot, [she] dipped in-and-out of movies to entertain [herself]...just watching it and pausing it.', adding that filling up journey times with smartphone film-viewing is primarily about being entertained. However, fragmented viewing on smartphones means that films are not always watched

all the way through, as Nicola (emphasis added) explains ‘...in terms of consuming film, I will watch it on Netflix more than I do watch on the actual TV...I’ve never watched *a whole film* on my phone, [but] I’ve seen people doing that now all the time.’

Others opt to use smartphones for the breadth of films they offer, rather than their temporal or spatial flexibility. Patsy, for instance, has ‘...an app on my phone that lets you buy films that have recently just come out...I watch lots of things on there’. Her account highlights an instantaneousness involved with watching films on a smartphone, where new releases can be watched immediately, anywhere, as soon as they come out. However, as Ernst notes, ‘Netflix has a wide choice of films... you can stream on your phone [and] on the TV, it’s cheap as well, and it’s got a good range of films. Not everything, but a good range’. Here, the capacity to watch a specific film at any time does not revolve only around new releases, but on being able to stream films from a broad range (including old films) at any chosen time and place.

In terms of where smartphone film-viewing takes place, some people, like Lancelot have ‘...watched tonnes of film on my phone, lying in bed...’, treating the smartphone much like a laptop or tablet. Others, like Scarlett, watch films on a smartphone when at home, but whilst carrying out other activities in various rooms, noting that ‘I used to watch it with my friends in the living-room...[or] on my phone and, like, [while doing] things, various things – making food’. Meanwhile, other people take up the opportunities smartphones offer for watching films whilst away from home. Ruth, for instance ‘...tend[s] to watch them on [her] phone... on the bus or metro or whatever...’ to pass the journey time. Likewise, Dick uses his smartphone to ‘...watch Netflix [while] at work... [where he] can have [his] break and [he] can put the earphones in the ear holes and watch a film...’. Despite the temporal and spatial flexibility that smartphones offer for watching film, what these accounts show is that smartphone film-viewing is often associated with specific times and places – such as the train or bus carriage when travelling or break-time when at work. Together, these accounts depict smartphones being used as a convenient screen type for watching films at various times and places. Although this is primarily associated with entertainment, some people watch films on their smartphone to escape from their immediate environment, as Patsy notes: ‘I was at work the other day and I was watching a new horror film IT. I love horror films. I love them....and it was like really good HD and everything. It’s a nice way of, like, switching off from the world’. That is, despite being used in a relatively uniform way as a technology, as media smartphones are interpreted and made meaningful in different ways by different people when watching films.

In summary, when people watch films on a smartphone, they have opportunities to watch a broad

array of films at any time or place they choose. In taking up those opportunities to varying degrees, people watch films in specific places, e.g. at home or the workplace. Also, at specific times, e.g. when travelling or on a work break period. People also tend to fragment films, watching them in different segments either for entertainment or to escape from their immediate surroundings.

DISCUSSION: TIME, SPACE AND TRIPLE ARTICULATIONS OF USING SCREENS TO WATCH FILMS

The way people watch films is shaped by how different screens fit into the time and space they have available, and the viewing experiences they associate with each screen. The influence of time in relation to the use of screens is seen in two discrete ways. One way is that people plan to see a film shown at a set time on a large cinema screen or choose to watch films broadcast at scheduled times on smaller television screens at home. Another aspect of time relates to film choice, with viewers predominantly watching new releases at the cinema and older films scheduled by broadcasters on television. These types of film-viewing are planned around institutional time, namely that of cinema programming and broadcast television schedules. People also use small and mobile screens to watch films when they want and can choose to watch a film all the way through or in separate segments at different times fitting their film-viewing into their own personal time. They can also manage how they engage with a film during the time it is playing by starting, stopping and/or pausing, by recording films to watch when they want, or by selecting from a range of films through on demand services.

The influence of space in relation to the use of screens connects with these temporalities through the opportunities each screen offers. Cinema venues offer large screens that are fixed within auditorium-spaces, with people using them to watch scheduled films all the way through, undisturbed, and in anonymity. The institutional screening time of films is paired with the fixed placement of the cinema screen, meaning people must make decisions about whether or not to go to the cinema as a specific space to see a particular film at a specific time. Televisions, laptops and tablets are fixed within different private and domestic spaces of the home, while smartphones are associated with the mobility of watching films in particular public spaces. People sometimes emulate the cinema experience in their domestic spaces by drawing the curtains in the living-room to emulate the darkness of a cinema auditorium.

The triple articulation (Hartmann, 2006) of screens interacts with the temporal and spatial dynamics of film-viewing to create particular viewing experiences. The large screen in cinemas (object), the programmed

film (text) and darkened auditoriums (context) provide consumer-focussed viewing experiences. This is shaped by the institutional timing of programming and by the relationships people have with particular cinema venues. The small screen of television (object) shows films (text) that are broadcast at scheduled times, which people watch when aired or by starting/stopping and/or recording them to watch when they choose. People also stream films on-demand when they choose (text), watching them in the domestic space of their living-room either or alone or with friends and/or family (context). This provides a relaxing experience, where people can watch alone or socialise with others by watching a film together. The portable screen of laptops and tablets (objects) are used to watch films selected from a broad range, including old and new ones – often to catch-up on films missed when shown at the cinema or broadcast on television (text). Despite their portability, laptops and tablets are watched in the private space of the bedroom to relax (context). The mobile screen of smartphones (object) provides an opportunity to watch a broad range of films, including old and new ones. People use smartphones to stream or download films to watch at any time they choose (text) and in various places, both inside and outside the home (context). People watch films on smartphone screens for entertainment and to fill time (e.g. when travelling or during breaktime at work) and their viewing experience is often fragmented to fit around personal time. What this shows is that people relate to and interact with screens in different ways, and that they choose particular screens for the specific film-viewing experiences they offer.

CONCLUSION: RELATIONS AND INTERACTIONS OF USING SCREENS TO WATCH FILM

The way people choose each screen is shaped by a triple articulation, namely of what it offers in terms of film choice and the temporal and spatial context of its use. Through their different viewing experiences, people develop personal relationships with particular screens. The different relationships and the interactions they entail (Livingstone, 2003) that people have within each triple articulation include those with particular types of screen, different ranges of films and the contexts in which they can be watched.

Watching films at a cinema involves interacting with the cinema venue, the cinema screen, other people in the same auditorium and the specific film. The darkness of the cinema auditorium means people have fewer opportunities to interact with other viewers. This generates a sense of anonymity. The programming of films by cinemas means that people have to watch films at specific institutionalised times. These experiences feature in the ways a person develops a relationship with

the film, a venue, and the audience experience. This can be enhanced because people tend to watch a film all the way through with limited distraction or interaction with other people at the cinema. Watching films on television involves interacting with the television screen in the living-room by choosing either to watch films when broadcast or by selecting, recording, stopping/starting or streaming films on-demand. It also involves interacting with friends/family members when watching together. People's relationship with the smaller screen can be less immersive than with cinema screen, with people interacting more with others whilst watching. Part of the relationship with a television screen is how people watch films together in a domestic setting. This can involve relaxing with a partner or group of friends and/or socialising through watching a film together. Watching films on laptop and tablet screens involves interacting with a small screen in the bedroom to watch new or old films, often by catching up on ones missed elsewhere while watching either alone or with others. People develop a relationship with watching on a small laptop or tablet screen in the private space of the bedroom. They move laptops and tablets around when in the bedroom, either by holding the screen whilst in bed or by placing it at the end of the bed. It offers an opportunity for them to relax, or (like television) to watch specific films at a time that suits them. Although smartphone screens are smaller than others, their convenient size offers greater spatial flexibility for interacting with a broad range of films in various places and at various times. People interact with films through smartphones on their own, watching them in separate segments, at different times and in different places. This generates a relationship with watching films both for entertainment and to fill time that is fragmented and potentially interrupted by how else they might be interacting with the smartphone screen (e.g. taking calls or checking social media).

People make sense of screens and are selective in choosing which one to use when watching a film, and in taking up the temporal and spatial flexibilities it offers. This selectivity revolves around people actively seeking out specific film-viewing experiences. Screens are therefore important in shaping film-viewing experiences. To understand how time and space feature within the triple articulation of watching films on each screen, we have looked at the relations and interactions they entail. We have shown that to understand contemporary film-viewing, attention needs to be paid not just to films as texts, or the times and spaces they are watched, but also to the characteristics of the screen involved. This is because people place value on the temporal and spatial opportunities for watching film that different screen types offer and the experiences they can elicit by choosing to watch films on particular screens in different ways.

We have addressed the four most prevalent screen types in our research, but given the importance of screens and how they relate to the variety of film-viewing experiences

further research could address new and emerging screen innovations. For instance, by looking at the experiences of interactive media technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality – a topic that has recently begun to be explored by the Bristol VR Lab (Watershed, 2020). A similar approach could be undertaken with established, but less prevalent screen configurations, such as pop-up cinemas, community mobile cinema, open air cinema, purpose-built home cinemas, drive-in cinema, airline film watching, expanded cinema and artists' film installations. Likewise, examining how the articulation of each of the four types of screen articulation shifts and changes in post-pandemic landscape could prove useful in efforts towards recovery of the film sector.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Supplement Files.** Data Transcripts. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/os.35.s1>

NOTE

- 1 We interviewed 200 people, each aged 18 and over. This included 106 women and 94 men, 30 participants with a self-identified disability, and nine from a black or minority ethnicity background. 108 of the interview participants were employed full-time (25 or more hours per week), with 25 in full-time education and 29 retired. 146 held a University degree with 52 holding other qualifications (A-Levels, GCSEs, or O-Levels). See Wessels et al. (2019) for the anonymised interview transcripts.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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